Companion Planting to Control the Insects in Your Garden

Plants to Attract Beneficial Insects and Repel Pests

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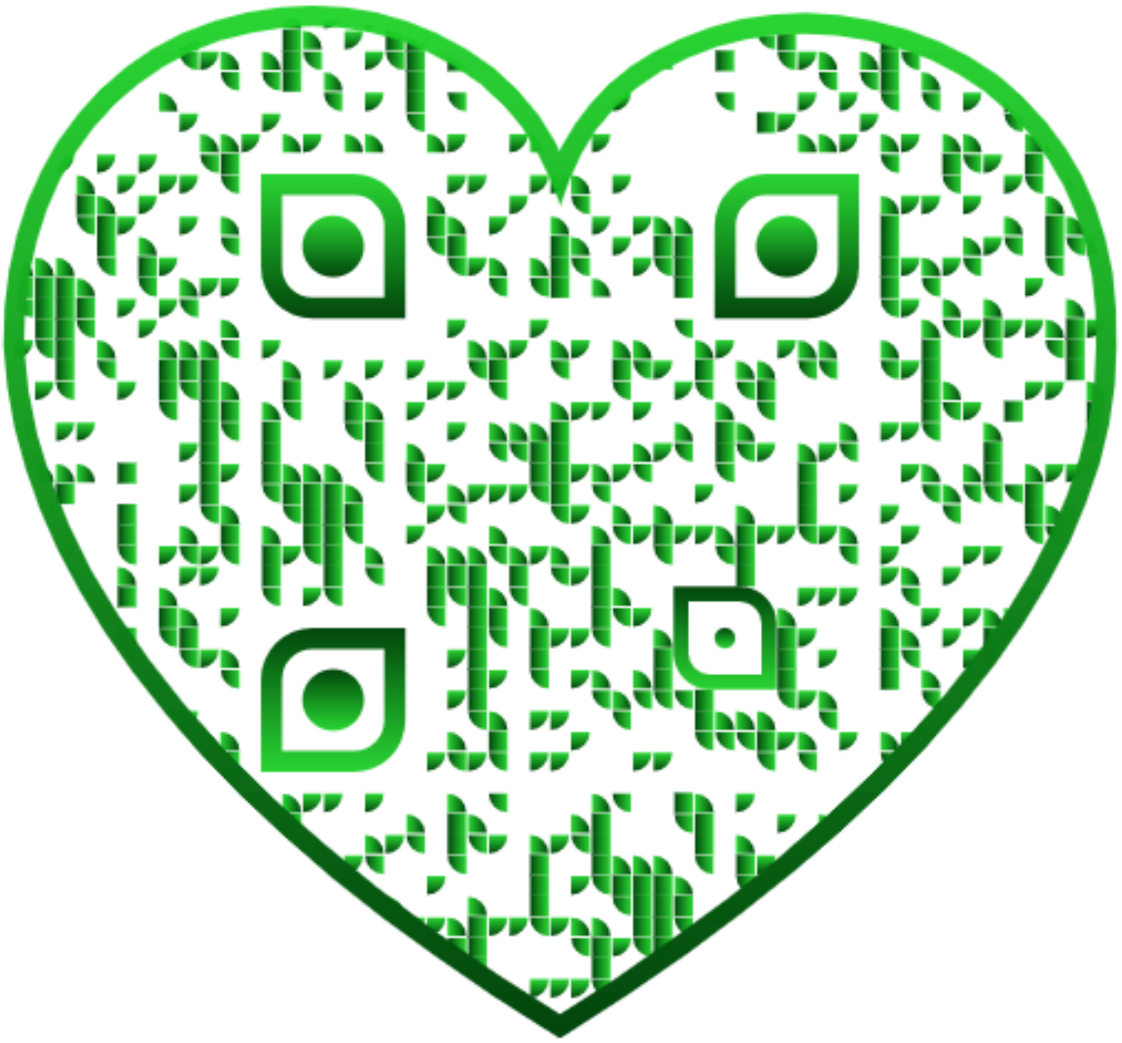
Companion planting is an age-old gardening methodology, especially for vegetables. This is a practice that involves planting two or more different plants near each other to derive some type of benefit.[1] That benefit could be more vigorous growth, higher yield, repelling pests, or attracting the predators of common pests. While scientific research may not always agree with the folklore surrounding companion planting, at the very least it adds diversity in the garden, which itself may cut back on problems and increase yields.

Learning which plants to pair as companions takes a bit of trial and error. For example, anise seems to germinate better when grown with coriander, but coriander doesn't grow well next to anise. Garlic deters Japanese beetles but when planted too close to anything in the pea and bean family it will inhibit their growth.



One compelling reason to practice companion planting is the tendency of certain plants to attract beneficial insects.[1] Beneficials are insects that feed on common garden pests, like aphids and caterpillars. Beneficial insects are considered the good guys and are the best reason not to spray insecticides at random.

These beneficial insects should be welcome in your garden:

- Parasitoid wasps feed on aphids, caterpillars, and grubs.
- Lacewing larvae feed on aphids.
- Ladybug larvae feed on aphids.
- Ground beetles feed on ground-dwelling pests.
- Hoverflies and robber flies feed on many insects, including leafhoppers and caterpillars.
- Mantids feed on flying insects such as cucumber beetles and squash bugs
- Common garden spiders feed on grasshoppers and caterpillar laying moths.

Because insects tend to have different feeding requirements during the various stages of their development, a diversity of plant material is essential to attracting them. Although beneficial insects do feast on pest insects, there may be certain points in their life cycles when their diets are confined to nectar and pollen. To attract these insects to your garden, you will need to provide host plants and even plants for shelter. Planting a small bed of Zinnias in the vegetable garden will bring in pollinators which also helps to increase yields from beans, squash, vine fruits such as melons, and cucumbers. Sunflowers make excellent borders, also attracting pollinators and providing food for songbirds.

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Diversity in both plant material and the season of availability is crucial. Hedgerows used to serve this function. The trees, shrubs, and weeds would leaf out sooner in the spring than cultivated crops and provide early food sources.

benefit your ornamentals, and planting it near a vegetable garden will ensure beneficial insects on your vegetable crops.

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What You'll Need to Attract Beneficial Insects

Use these plants and garden layout to attract beneficial insects:

- Low-growing plants as cover for ground beetles (thyme, rosemary, or mint)
- Shady, protected areas for laying eggs
- Tiny flowers for tiny wasps, like plants from the *Umbelliferae* family: fennel, angelica, coriander, dill, Queen Anne's lace, clovers, yarrow, and rue
- Composite flowers (daisy and chamomile) and mints (spearmint, peppermint, or catnip) to attract predatory wasps, hoverflies, and robber flies

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Using Herbs As Companion Plants to Deter Pests

Herbs work especially well as companion plants.[1] They multitask by attracting beneficial insects and repelling pest insects and their fragrance and foliage make them good companions in both the vegetable garden and the ornamental border. The following list is compiled from experience and suggestions. Keep in mind that some things work in conjunction with other factors in the environment and your results might not be the same as mine. However, with some tweaking here and there, you should be able to use plants to keep a better balance in your gardens.

- **Aphids:** chives, coriander, nasturtium
- **Ants:** tansy
- **Asparagus beetle:** pot marigold
- **Bean beetle:** marigold, nasturtium, rosemary
- **Cabbage moth:** hyssop, mint, oregano, rosemary, sage, southernwood, tansy, thyme
- **Carrot fly:** rosemary, sage
- **Flea beetle:** mint, catmint (contains nepetalactone, an insect repellent, and can be steeped in water and sprayed on your plants)

- **Japanese beetles:** garlic and rue (when used near roses and raspberries), tansy
- **Potato bugs:** horseradish
- **Mosquitoes:** basil, rosemary
- **Moths:** santolina
- **Nematodes:** marigold (should be established for at least one year before their nematode deterring properties will take effect)
- **Squash bugs and beetles:** nasturtium, tansy
- **Ticks:** lavender (also thought to repel mice and moths)
- **Tomato hornworm:** borage, pot marigold
- **General:** winter savory has some insect-repelling qualities

Books for Further Reading

You can explore more about companion planting with these books from Amazon:

- "Great Garden Companions (A Companion-Planting System for a Beautiful, Chemical-Free Vegetable Garden)," by Sally Jean Cunningham, Rodale Organic Living Books
- "Carrots Love Tomatoes," by Louise Riotte, Workman Publishing Company

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